

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS BILL

Mr. REID. Madam President, today the Senate continues its consideration of the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill. This appropriations bill is a modest step in the right direction. It provides resources and will address the veteran care backlog, including 770 new claims processors and 200 new appeals adjudicators. It expands medical treatment for veterans, and it provides State grants for extended care homes in rural areas, which is extremely important.

I want to make sure one thing is understood and is very clear. If it had been up to Republicans, this legislation would have shortchanged America's veterans. Let's remember that Republicans' original appropriations bill for the VA was a far cry from this funding measure today. They ranted and raved, but in the process, would have cost the veterans \$2 billion. The Republicans' bill included devastating sequester caps that would have underfunded the Veterans' Administration by billions of dollars. If Republicans had passed their bill, 70,000 vets would not receive the care they deserve—70,000.

The reason the Senate is considering this much improved appropriations legislation is because Democrats refused to go along with Republican efforts to underfund veterans and our middle class. Instead, Democrats held firm to stop devastating sequester cuts from hitting America's domestic priorities. Because we refused to let Republicans undermine care for our veterans, funding for the Veterans' Administration is more than \$2 billion over what it would have been.

Democrats refused to let congressional Republicans do what they always do: disregard the needs of the middle class—in this case middle class veterans—those people at home we so try to protect. In the aftermath of President Bush's two unpaid-for wars, Republicans have made little effort to meet the Nation's obligations to its veterans. The work that has been done in recent years to do a better job for our veterans, including wounded warriors legislation and on and on, are things that we on this side of the aisle proposed and passed.

This is symptomatic of today's Republicans. They want to start and fund wars overseas, but when the bill comes—when the time comes to make good on the promises to our servicemembers, many Republicans are nowhere to be found.

Taking care of our veterans is one of the prices of war. It is one of the costs of a robust defense that keeps America safe. To neglect that responsibility is callous, and some say immoral.

We can do better by our Nation's veterans. This appropriations bill is a start. We still have a long way to go in meeting our commitments to the brave men and women who defend our country and have defended our country.

FOREIGN SERVICE NOMINATIONS

Mr. REID. Madam President, for more than 3 months, the senior Senator from Iowa has been blocking the confirmation, the promotion of more than 20 career Foreign Service officers.

These Foreign Service officers are career diplomats. They are some of the finest people in our government. They are brave. They work in some of the most remote, difficult, and crime-ridden war zones in the world. Many of these Foreign Service officers are always ready to serve at a moment's notice in hotspots throughout the world—hot spots like Iraq and Afghanistan.

These diplomats are not partisan; they are diplomats. They are not political appointments. That is why it is troubling to see the senior Senator from Iowa politicize their promotions. He admits that he is blocking the promotion of these Foreign Service officers until he gets answers about Secretary Hillary Clinton's emails and her aide, a woman by the name of Huma Abedin.

I have told Senator GRASSLEY he is making a mistake by targeting these fine public servants. They have worked all over the world. With rare exception, they know multiple languages. But instead of changing course and doing what is right by these diplomats, Senator GRASSLEY seems to be doubling down on his obstruction.

As the Senator from Iowa digs in on this failed policy, more innocent people—these diplomats—are being caught in the resulting backlog. Last month, the Senate received several letters containing more than 600 Foreign Service promotions. In years past, it didn't matter if Democrats controlled the Senate or Republicans, they would have passed that list quickly in a matter of a day or two, with no opposition, of course.

Times have changed, and these lists of 600 career Foreign Service officers sit unpassed before this body. Among the 600 individuals on this promotion list are two people from Iowa. These Iowans—that is right, two of the constituents of the senior Senator from Iowa are being denied a promotion.

Why are nonpartisan public servants being used as political pawns, especially if they are being blocked just because Senator GRASSLEY doesn't want Hillary Clinton to be the next President of the United States. I haven't heard who he is supporting—Trump, Carson, CRUZ, RUBIO, Bush, Christie, or a long list of others. But, obviously, he doesn't want Hillary Clinton to be elected.

So I ask the senior Senator from Iowa: Is he blocking two of his own constituents? Why? Should Senator GRASSLEY allow all of the Foreign Service lists to be confirmed by the Senate without further delay? Of course he should. We could confirm them right now.

It is time for my friend from Iowa to end these foolish campaigns to undermine Secretary Clinton. Under Senator

GRASSLEY's leadership, the Judiciary Committee continues to hound the State Department for information about Secretary Clinton and her staffers. He and his fellow Republicans want emails. He wants to see timesheets for State Department employees, as do some other Republicans. Committee staff wants transcribed interviews with email vendors, and they want maternity leave records for one of Secretary Clinton's closest aides, Huma Abedin.

Think about that: Republicans want to know how long a member of Secretary Clinton's staff took for her maternity leave. Is that ludicrous? Of course it is.

Those who know Ms. Abedin best can vouch for her integrity and her work ethic as a close aide to Senator Clinton for decades. When her reputation was attacked in the past—that is Ms. Abedin's—Republicans, including Senator JOHN MCCAIN, defended her.

Here is what Senator MCCAIN said: “an intelligent, upstanding, hard-working, loyal servant of our country . . . the daughter of immigrants who has risen to the highest levels of our government on her substantial personal merit.”

Can my colleagues imagine wanting to know if she took off too much time to have a baby?

Let's remember that she is a staff member, not a principal. It is one thing to level charges at an elected Member of Congress or the administration. It is a completely different matter to target a staff member, especially someone who Senator MCCAIN says “represents the best about America.”

How much money would a Republican Congress waste to try to bring down Hillary Clinton? We don't know by the numbers. We have already seen that the so-called House Select Committee on Benghazi has wasted 18 months and more than \$5 million. Numerous other committees have conducted similar investigations. We don't know how much they have cost, but it is millions.

How much taxpayer money is Senator GRASSLEY and the Judiciary Committee wasting on its anti-Clinton campaign? We know how much money and staff are being devoted to investigating Secretary Clinton in the House—\$8,000 to \$10,000 a day, and that is low-balling. How many millions of dollars are the American people paying for the Judiciary Committee to duplicate the House's wasteful political attacks?

The senior Senator from Iowa is always talking on the floor about the proper use of taxpayer resources. He should walk into his bathroom, look into the mirror, and find out what he is doing about the proper use of taxpayer resources. He should be willing to tell us about the resources his committee has used to investigate Secretary Clinton.

The American people deserve to know how much money is being spent on these investigations, especially if